



St. Mary's County Teen Court
Department of Aging & Human Services
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Dress & Behavior Code

Introduction

Teen Court is a voluntary one-time juvenile justice diversionary program which allows first time juvenile misdemeanor offenders to resolve their offenses through an informal judicial process. The cases are heard by a jury of the respondent's peers who assess a disposition (sentence) appropriate for the individual and the offense. Teen Court is a "hands on" educational opportunity, which allows teen offenders and teen volunteers to better understand our system of justice. Upon successful completion of Teen Court, the respondent's case is closed and not forwarded to the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS), thereby avoiding the offense creating a juvenile criminal record. The cases are real, with the hearings held in the St. Mary's County District Courthouse. In keeping with the significance of the proceeding, the following are the appropriate dress and behavior codes that are enforced for all respondents, jurors, and volunteers:

Teen Court Dress Code

- Neat and clean attire only. Khakis or dress pants and a collared shirt or blouse, as applicable, are very appropriate. Girls may wear dresses or long skirts. Solid colored jeans are acceptable only if they are not faded, ripped, or dirty. Shirts, blouses or tops which have been intentionally torn or cut up to make a fashion statement are forbidden. Shirts and blouses must be tucked into pants or skirts. Pants must sufficiently fit or be fastened at the waistline.
- No caps or hats in the courtroom.
- No short shorts or short skirts.
- No tank tops or exposed midriffs.
- No inappropriate logos on shirts. Indecent or obscene pictures or language on shirts is in **direct criminal contempt of court**.
- No sagging pants or exposed underwear.
- Tennis shoes are permitted as long as they are clean and neat. Flip-flops are not permitted at any time.
- Jewelry worn in a pierced body part other than an ear lobe must be removed or covered. Vulgar tattoos must be covered. Hairstyles or hair colors found to be inappropriate by the Community Judge will have to be corrected before the next court appearance.

Teen Court Behavior Code

Demeanor and posture:

- When standing before the judge, stand up straight with arms either at your side or with hands clasped in front or behind you. Hands should not be placed on hips or inside pockets and no crossed arms. No chewing gum.
- During the hearings, sit up straight and do not look out into the audience. Respondents may talk to their lawyer, but no one else.
- While in the audience, keep silent, unless spoken to by an officer of the court. Keep your hands to yourself and do not move around the courtroom.

Speaking to the court:

- Speak loud enough to be heard by the judge.
- Shaking your head and other gestures are not acceptable.
- The proper ways to answer questions are "Yes, sir/ma'am," or "Yes, your honor," and "No, sir/ma'am," or "No, your honor." A simple "yes" or "no" is not acceptable.
- Words like "yeah," "yep," "uh-huh," "nope," and "uh-uh" are never acceptable.

- Law enforcement officers are referred to as “Officer”, “Deputy”, or “Police Officer”. Referring to law enforcement officers as “Cop” is not acceptable or appropriate in court.

General:

- All individuals entering the Carter Building are required to go through the established security checkpoint.
- There will be NO EATING, DRINKING or GUM-CHEWING in the courtroom.
- Cell phones and other communication devices must be *turned off* at all times unless otherwise directed.
- No one will be admitted into the courtroom without proper I.D. or approval by the Teen Court Coordinator.
- Sign-in is required for all Teen Court volunteers upon arrival at the Teen Court session. Volunteers are not permitted to leave the designated Teen Court area until Court is dismissed.
- Due to juvenile proceeding rules, unless otherwise approved by the Teen Court Coordinator, parents and/or legal guardians are the only non-Teen Court staff individuals permitted to observe the Teen Court proceeding. Permission to observe must be obtained from the Teen Court Coordinator in advance.
- At the conclusion of the court session, all participants are to exit the building only through front doors.
- Always walk in groups.
- There is to be no running in the Carter Building halls.
- Smoking or possession of tobacco by anyone under the age of 18 is prohibited in accordance with Maryland State Law and will be STRICTLY ENFORCED.

Teen Court reserves the right to refuse participation of anyone who does not abide by the dress or behavior codes.